



PRESS CLIPPINGS

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ECONOMIC GROWTH

(Economic Reform, Private Sector Development, Trade and Agriculture)

RP to continue receiving USAID support for biotech development

(Source: Malaya News Online – 3/24/08)

The Philippines will continue to be a major recipient of agri-biotech funds under the Agricultural Biotechnology Support Project II (ABSP II), a program funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) meant to boost agricultural production.

Frank Shotkoski, director of the ABSP II, made this assurance during a visit at the newly transplanted papaya ringspot virus-resistant (PRSV-R) papaya seedlings under confined trial in Barangay Paciano Rizal, Bay, Laguna.

Dr. Patricio S. Faylon, executive director of the Philippine Council for Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Resources Research and Development (PCARRD) and Dr. Enrico P. Supangco, Vice Chancellor for Research and Extension of UP Los Banos together with and partner, Dr. Clive James, chairman of the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA) and Shotkoski led the site inspection.

Shotkoski said he was impressed by the progress of the PRSV-R papaya project in the Philippines and promised funding support for it, saying it was a "job well done."

James also lauded the PRSV-R papaya project team's accomplishment, saying they have done an excellent job so far.

Shotkoski said ABSPII, a five-year program that started in 2002, ended last year. The USAID extended the project this year, with the Philippines, being one of the major beneficiaries.

A budget of \$17.5 million was spent for the project from 2002-2007.

This year, Shotkoski said, the same amount will likely be spent to promote the development of agro-biotech crops such as the PRSV-R papaya.

ABSPII is also supporting the research and development of the Multi Virus-resistant Tomato (MVR) tomato in the Philippines, late blight-resistant potato in India, Bangladesh and Indonesia, and drought and salt-tolerant rice in Indonesia.

According to Dr. Desiree Hautea, transplanting the seedlings for confined trial in a natural environment is considered a milestone as far as the PRSV-R papaya project is concerned.

She said they will be able to grow the genetically engineered papaya outside a controlled environment.

"We will be able to finally see if we have a product," she said, explaining that the result of the confined trial will determine whether they have really accomplished something in the laboratory.

According to Hautea, they also planted ordinary papaya at the experimental lot for comparison.

"If those ordinary papaya were infected by the virus, and the in the process die and the PRSV-R papaya survive bear fruits with the desired characteristics, then we can finally say that we succeeded," she said.

After multi-location field trial, the next step will be commercial release of the first ever "Pinoy Biotech" crop.

The confined trial will be conducted in a fenced and regulated-access experimental lot that was previously inspected and approved by the National Biosafety Committee of the Philippines (NCBP), the Bureau of Plant Industry - Plant Quarantine Services (BPI-PQS) and the PLB Institutional Biosafety Committee.

The ABSPII's PRSV-R Project team led by Dr. Hautea started transplanting the genetically-engineered papaya seedlings last Friday, February 8, covering 3,500 sq. m. of the 1.2-hectare experimental site, after getting the nod of the National Biosafety Committee of the Philippines (NCBP) last October 13, 2007.

Hautea said the confined field trial would be done under natural conditions to determine and further evaluate the horticultural characteristics of the papaya. Four papaya were transplanted, from which the team will select the best product with the desired traits like resistance to the deadly virus, yield, taste, shelf color size of fruit and smell.